

George Washington to John A. Washington, December 18, 1776, The Writings of George Washington from the Original Manuscript Sources, 1745-1799. John C. Fitzpatrick, Editor.

***To JOHN AUGUSTINE WASHINGTON**

Camp, near the Falls of Trenton, December 18, 1776.

Dear Brother: In the number of Letters I write, the recollection of any particular one is destroyed, but I think my last to you was by Colo. Woodford from Hackensack. Since that period and a little before, our Affairs have taken an adverse turn but not more than was to be expected from the unfortunate Measures, which had been adopted for the establishment of our Army.

The Retreat of the Enemys Army from the White Plains led me to think that they would turn their thoughts to the Jerseys, if no further, and induced me to cross the North River with some of the Troops, in order if possible to oppose them. I expected to have met at least 5000 Men of the Flying Camp and Militia; instead of which I found less than one half and no disposition in the Inhabitants to afford the least aid. This being perfectly well known to the Enemy, they threw over a large body of Troops, which pushed us from place to place till we were obliged to cross the Delaware with less than 3000 Men fit for duty owing to the dissolution of our force by short Inlistments; the Enemy's numbers, from the best Accts. exceeding Ten and by some 12,000 Men.

Before I removed to the South Side of the River, I had all the Boats, and other Vessels brought over, or destroyed from Philadelphia upwards for 70 Miles, and, by guarding the Fords have as yet, baffled all their attempts to cross. But, from some late movement of

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theirs, I am left in doubt whether they are moving off for Winter Quarters or making a feint to throw us off our guard.

Since I came on this side, I have been join'd by about 2000 of the City Militia, and understand that some of the Country Militia (from the back Counties,) are on their way; *but we are in a very disaffected part of the Province, and between you and me, I think our Affairs are in a very bad situation; not so much from the apprehension of Genl. Howe's Army, as from the defection of New York, Jerseys, and Pensylvania. In short, the Conduct of the Jerseys has been most Infamous. Instead of turning out to defend their Country and affording aid to our Army, they are making their submissions as fast as they can. If they the Jerseys had given us any support, we might have made a stand at Hackensack and after that at Brunswick, but the few Militia that were in Arms, disbanded themselves [or slunk off in such a manner upon the appearance of danger as to leave us quite unsupported and to make the best shifts we could without them] and left the poor remains of our Army to make the best we could of it.*

I have no doubt but that General Howe will still make an attempt upon Philadelphia this Winter. I see nothing to oppose him a fortnight hence, as the time of all the Troops, except those of Virginia (reduced almost to nothing,) and Smallwood's Regiment of Maryland, (equally as bad) will expire in less than that time. In a word my dear Sir, *if every nerve is not strain'd* to recruit the New Army with all possible expedition, *I think the game is pretty near up, owing, in a great measure, to the insidious Arts of the Enemy, and disaffection of the Colonies before mentioned, but principally to the accursed policy of short Inlistments, and placing too great a dependence on the Militia the Evil consequences of which were foretold 15 Months ago with a spirit almost Prophetick.*

Before this reaches you, you will no doubt have heard of the Captivity of Genl. Lee; this is an additional misfortune, and the more vexatious, as it was by his own folly and Imprudence (and without a view to answer any good) he was taken, going three Miles out of his own Camp [for the sake of a little better lodging] and with 20 of the Enemy to lodge,

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a rascally Tory rid in the Night to give notice of it to the Enemy who sent a party of light Horse that seized and carried him with every mark of triumph and indignity.

You can form no Idea of the perplexity of my Situation. No Man, I believe, ever had a greater choice of difficulties and less means to extricate himself from them. However under a full persuasion of the justice of our Cause I cannot [but think the prospect will brighten, although for a wise purpose it is, at present hid under a cloud] entertain an Idea that it will finally sink tho' it may remain for some time under a Cloud.

My love, and sincere regards attend my Sister and the Family and Compliments to [our friends at Fairfield] all enquiring friends. With every Sentiment of friendship, as well as love, I am etc.¹

¹According to Doctor Toner, there was, in 1892, a letter of practically this same wording in the archives of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. It also is in Washington's writing, dated Dec. 18, 1776, and addressed to Samuel Washington, Berkeley County, Va. The important variations in the letter sent to Samuel Washington appear herewith in brackets.